

# Planting Native Vegetation in Non-farmed Areas

**N**ative vegetation systems are the grasses, shrubs, and trees that originally grew in California soils. Over time, these plants have adapted to and can thrive in specific local soil types, water cycles, climate conditions, and other factors. Corridors of mixed native perennial grasses and other vegetation can be planted along roadsides, berms, ditch banks, canals, field borders, and other non-cropped areas *without interfering with farming operations*. These California natives are friendly to wildlife because of the rich and sustainable mixtures of food, cover, and habitat they offer. One Yolo County farmer counted more than 100 species of birds in non-farmed areas he had planted with native perennial vegetation, including nesting pheasants, waterfowl, and songbirds.

In addition to attracting wildlife species, many of which are beneficial to farmers, native plant systems offer many other



*It may be necessary to protect young trees from browsing deer and rodents until they become established.*

farming advantages. For example, once they're established native grasses suppress and eliminate unwanted vegetation and attract beneficial insects. It usually takes native grasses two-to-three years to crowd out competing weeds. During this period the area will require spot spraying, mowing, managed grazing, burning, or other typical management activities that can mesh with your work crew schedules, existing equipment, and other farming activities. Established stands are

essentially maintenance free, eliminating the need for expensive pesticide and discing programs. These long-lived perennials have extensive root systems that enhance water infiltration and control erosion. Most tolerate drought, fire, mowing, and traffic. By planting species that flower at different times of year, native plants can also provide pollen and nectar for many species of beneficial insects that are helpful in controlling farm pests.

Native plant systems can mimic natural landscapes; a roadside or field berm can duplicate a grassland or a shelterbelt of native trees can mimic a riparian edge. These areas can add beauty to the farm, provide valuable habitat for wildlife—and eventually reduce labor and expense in your farming operation.

Many specialty nurseries carry supplies of native grasses, shrubs, and trees and native seed is available from some seed dealers. Contact your local NRCS or RCD offices, the California Native Plant Society, or the California Native Grass Association to help you locate local seed sources. A number of cost-share programs are also available to help interested farmers get started with natives.

*Much like the native grasslands in early California, this horse at Hedgerow Farms makes his way through blue wild rye that is shoulder high.*

